

African Wildlife Conservation Fund

Annual Report 2007



2007 was an exciting year for the African Wildlife Conservation Fund (AWCF). AWCF was granted its non-profit 501(c)3 status, giving us a means to coordinate all of our conservation projects and get serious about fund raising for our conservation work. The AWCF logo was designed by Tiemen Rhebergen, a Dutch volunteer working on the wild dog project.



Photo: Tiemen Rhebergen

Tiemen had quite a bit of spare time on his hands due to our exceptionally unreliable field vehicle, a 35 year old series II A Land Rover.



Photo: Peter Lindsey working on our old Land Rover

Thankfully, AWCF managed to raise funds to purchase a new field vehicle which will revolutionize the project and help make life more comfortable for the project team...



Photo: AWCF team using our old Land Rover on a camping trip to find wild dog dens

Accomplishments this year

Our main foci in 2007 were bush-meat poaching, endangered wild dog conservation, and conducting a lion and hyena population census, all in the Savé Valley Conservancy (SVC) in south eastern Zimbabwe.

Bush-meat trade

Our research into the bush-meat trade has yielded some important insights into how the industry operates and has provided potential solutions to help solve the problem. The data we collected on the ecological and financial impacts of bush-meat poaching has helped the Savé Valley Conservancy (SVC) lobby for assistance to help address the problem. Encouragingly, following submission of a report from our team, Zimbabwe's wildlife division provided

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increased assistance to help SVC to help combat poaching.

Though rewarding, the bush-meat project can be a bit depressing as we experience the frontline of the efforts to save wildlife from poachers. Sadly, sights like this lion caught in a snare are common.



To give an impression of how severe the threat of bush-meat poaching is, this photo shows snares that were collected from just one of the 16 ranches that make up SVC. Note the wheelbarrow at the front right of the photo for scale.



Bush-meat poaching is certainly not unique to SVC, or Zimbabwe; wildlife is under pressure from bush-meat hunters

throughout much of Africa. We hope that the insights we gain into the underlying causes for bush-meat poaching, and dynamics in the trade of bush-meat will help conservationists to address the problem in other parts of Africa.

Lowveld Wild Dog Project

2007 was an exciting year for the Lowveld Wild Dog Project (LWDP), despite the challenges of working with a 35 year old field vehicle! This is the 12th year the LWDP has been running. We managed to locate four den sites in 2007, such as the one in the photo below. Wild dogs are at dens with their puppies for three months of each year.



There are nine wild dog packs surviving in SVC, with a population of roughly 120 individuals. This means that SVC remains a crucially important stronghold for this endangered species. The wild dog team was on high alert this year, because all of the wild dogs in the neighbouring Malilangwe Trust were killed in a rabies outbreak. Thankfully, the disease did not spread to SVC so none of our dogs were affected. This was a relief, because we lost an entire pack of wild dogs in SVC to rabies in 2005. Wild dogs are particularly susceptible to rabies due to their social nature because

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if one dog catches the disease, then all of the dogs in a pack are likely to catch it and die.

Though the wild dogs in SVC did not suffer from disease this year, we did lose several individuals to snares. Wild dogs roam around widely and are a similar height to the antelopes that poachers target with wire snares. As a result, they are often caught and killed in snares. Our Chanurwe pack in the south of SVC was badly affected this year. That pack lives in an area with a lot of poaching activity and so they are often exposed to snare lines. Two dogs were injured in snares, and four more were killed including two of this year's pups. One of the oldest males in the pack, 'Limp' was caught in a snare in June. Thankfully, the poacher had used quite a soft snare so Limp managed to break without being injured. We managed to dart and anesthetize him and removed the snare.



Photo: Limp anesthetized to remove neck snare

Sadly, limp was caught in another snare in August and died. We removed a snare from the leg of a young male in April and we hope that he had more luck than poor Limp.



Photo: Young male wild dog leg snare removal

Lion census

Locally high lion densities are a potential threat to wild dogs, so AWCF has been actively monitoring the lion population in SVC. Lions have been colonizing SVC from Malilangwe Trust and Gonarezhou National Park to the south. In the last few years, the lion population has started to increase quickly, to the point where we expect to see some impacts on the wild dog population. This year, using call-ups and by counting lion tracks, (with the help of the Hwange Lion Research crew) we counted a 48 lions and 40 spotted hyenas in SVC, indicating that both species are increasing in number.



Photo: Lion track in the sand

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Plans for 2008

Wild dogs have been monitored in SVC continuously for 12 years now. We have decided to expand our monitoring efforts beyond SVC to include other wildlife areas. SVC will be incorporated into the Greater-Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area so we plan to monitor wild dogs on this wider regional scale. We will assess the status of wild dogs in the Zimbabwean portion of the Transfrontier Conservation Area to determine to what extent the population in Zimbabwe is connected with those in Mozambique, South Africa and Botswana. We will continue to use SVC as our focal study area, to assess the impact of key threats to wild dogs such as snaring, infectious diseases, and an increasing lion population.

Our human-wildlife conflict project will be taken to a higher level in 2008 when local Zimbabwean, Steven Matema, joins the AWCF team to commence his PhD on the topic.

We will continue the bush-meat project, lion and hyena monitoring, and assist with the rhino protection. 2008 promises to be a busy year in the bush!

Many thanks to all of our supporters for your help during 2007. Without your financial support, the great conservation results we have achieved to date would not have been possible.

The team



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Research Assistants



Mike James, Projects Manager



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Take a look at our new website!

www.africanwildlifeconservationfund.org